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PROGRAMME PLANNING

Proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001

Letter dated 5 November 1996 from the Chairman of the Second Committee to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee

I have the honour to refer to your letter of 26 September 1996 regarding agenda item 114 (Programme planning), inviting me to bring the matter to the attention of the Second Committee and to convey the views of the Committee on programmes of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 relevant to the work of the Committee.

The Second Committee held a debate on the matter on 17 October 1996. It was requested that subsequent informal consultations be arranged. These were held on 24 October 1996. On the basis of those consultations, it was decided that inputs from interested groups and countries would be conveyed to you. The relevant documents from Costa Rica, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, from Ireland, on behalf of the European Union, from New Zealand, on behalf of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, from the Russian Federation and from the United States of America, are annexed hereto.

(Signed) Arjan HAMBURGER
Chairman
Second Committee of the
General Assembly

Annex

VIEWS OF THE SECOND COMMITTEE ON PROGRAMMES OF THE PROPOSED MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1998-2001

[30 October 1996]

Introduction

1. The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to the examination of this sensitive issue which has a direct impact on the future work of the Organization, since it deals with the programme of work for the period 1998-2001. The Group of 77 and China strongly believes that consideration of item 114 (Programme planning) should be included in the agenda of each of the principal committees of the General Assembly for their respective analysis. In this regard, the Group reaffirms General Assembly resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986, in which the Assembly clearly asks for appropriate consideration of specific programmes by the competent intergovernmental bodies.

2. The Group of 77 and China requests that future consideration of the item (Programme planning) should include the necessary consultative processes among the main committees of the General Assembly, taking into account the provisions established in General Assembly resolution 41/213.

Programme 5. Policy coordination and sustainable development

3. The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to the activities implemented under the policy coordination and sustainable development programme. It seems to be drafted in accordance with relevant mandates and the outcome of international conferences. In this regard, the Group of 77 and China believes that the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination further improve the focus and policy orientation of the programme.

Programme 6. Africa: New Agenda for Development

4. The mid-term review of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s noted that major shortcomings in the implementation of the New Agenda were visible at both the advocacy and the institutional levels because of a lack of clear mandates and policy directions. It is therefore imperative that follow-up and monitoring arrangements be reviewed and strengthened if concrete results are to be achieved by the year 2001.

Subprogramme 6.1. Mobilization of international support and global coordination

5. This subprogramme should also provide for activities that involve the Secretary-General in the sensitization and mobilization of support and resources for the implementation of the New Agenda, in particular the urgent measures and recommendations agreed to at its mid-term review.

Subprogramme 6.2. Monitoring, assessment and follow-up to the implementation of action programmes for African development

6. The subprogramme should also ensure the sustainability of the activities aimed at promoting economic recovery and development in Africa by focusing on the areas of capacity-building and human resources development and by, inter alia, taking into account the outcome of the major international conferences and summits. At the national level, the medium-term plan should aim at ensuring that the urgent measures and recommendations agreed upon at the mid-term review are integrated within the context of country cooperation.

Subprogramme 6.3. The campaign for global awareness of the critical economic situation in Africa

7. In paragraph 6.10, the following text should be added:

"(b) bis To promote and strengthen subregional and regional cooperation and integration through appropriate programmes, especially those identified in the mid-term review."

Programme 8. Development support and management services

8. The recent major international conferences sponsored by the United Nations have established clear goals in key areas of international development cooperation, and have underscored the importance of the greater and more active role of the United Nations in development. The Group of 77 and China attaches special importance to this item and considers that it should be emphasized that the subprogrammes under this programme represent an important component of United Nations technical cooperation, provided on the basis of its universal, voluntary and grant nature, to assist developing countries, especially those in Africa, and the least developed countries, in implementing international commitments derived from the conferences.

9. In this regard, responding to the principal goal of the programme, the Group of 77 and China would like to incorporate the following amendments:

(a) Paragraph 8.1 should be reformulated as follows:

The general purpose of the programme, of which the Department for Development Support and Management Services is in charge is, in the first place, to promote and create a favourable climate for development in every country, particularly in the developing countries and the least developed among them, as well as in the countries with economies in transition. Thus, it should improve and support, by means of technical cooperation, the activities of Member States aimed at strengthening their administrative and financial systems for development, consolidating institutional capabilities and infrastructures and implementing economic and social policies, according to their national development priorities, so as to contribute to sustainable development, concentrating on the needs of the population and the eradication of poverty. To that end, the programme makes available to the developing countries and those with economies in transition technical

know-how and personnel specialized in the fields of public administration and finance, economic and social policy and planning, as well as the planning and management of natural and energy resources;

(b) In view of General Assembly resolution 50/225 of 19 April 1996, which sets out the mandate for the programme, subprogramme 8.1 should be entitled "Public administration, finance and development management";

(c) In subprogramme 8.2, on environment and social development management, it should be mentioned that the lack of financial and technological resources, information and technical knowledge and the debt crisis and unemployment are factors that have a negative impact on the environment and social development, as well as that eradication of poverty is of maximum importance for the developing countries and constitutes a basic condition for attaining sustainable development.

Programme 9. Trade and development

10. The medium-term plan should reflect the overall priority attached to the work of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as the focal point within the United Nations system for the integrated treatment of development and interrelated issues in the areas of trade, finance, technology, investment and sustainable development.

11. This programme has suffered a major change as a result of the restructuring of UNCTAD. In this context, of particular concern are the modifications introduced to subprogramme 9.5 in document A/51/6 (Prog. 9). This subprogramme was a separate programme under the responsibility of UNCTAD (Programme 15. Least developed, land-locked and island developing countries, and special programmes) in the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997. The fact that the programme has become a subprogramme is already a matter of grave concern for this group of countries and for the Group of 77 and China in general, and is contradictory to the mandates of the major United Nations conferences.

12. In this regard, the Group of 77 and China proposes the following:

(a) In paragraph 9.7 (d), to add the words "land-locked developing countries and small island developing States" after the words "least developed countries";

(b) In paragraph 9.12 (d), to add the words "in particular the least developed and land-locked developing countries and small island developing States" after the words "developing countries";

(c) In paragraph 9.13, to add a new subparagraph to read:

"(d) bis To assist the least developed and land-locked developing countries and small island developing States to overcome the special problems they face in developing enterprises";

(d) To add the words "land-locked developing countries and small island developing States" to the title of subprogramme 9.5;

(e) Paragraph 9.20 should be completely revised so as to retain most of former programme 15, taking into account the mandates of recent General Assembly resolutions and the outcomes of United Nations conferences, in particular the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

13. Finally, the Group of 77 and China requests the Secretary-General to submit the revised proposed programme 9 on trade and development, taking fully into account the results of the forty-third session of the Trade and Development Board.

Programme 11. Human settlements

14. The Group of 77 and China hopes that the Secretary-General will submit a revised proposed programme on human settlements, in the light of the results of Habitat II, in order to allow the Member States of the General Assembly to assess the programme and to take a final decision thereon.

REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

15. The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to the role that the regional commissions play in the economic and social areas of the United Nations.

16. The regional commissions have the important role of incorporating the regional dimension in the programmes and activities of the United Nations. Furthermore, in view of the fact that these entities are knowledgeable about specific situations in their regions, they are capable of responding in an efficient and effective manner to the specific assistance needs of each country in areas of concern.

17. Furthermore, the commitments and agreements adopted by recent United Nations conferences give additional responsibilities to the regional commissions in order to assist Member States in the implementation of such commitments and agreements.

18. In this regard, we reject any proposals to transfer the functions of the regional commissions to other institutions, which would diminish the role of the regional commissions.

Programme 14. Economic and social development in Africa

19. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in addition to its traditional role, chairs the Inter-Agency Task Force on African Economic Recovery and Development and is responsible for the effective implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s at the regional level.

Subprogramme 14.4. Harnessing information for development

20. This programme should clearly provide for activities aimed at implementing the New Agenda and incorporating the results of the action taken into the intergovernmental process.

Subprogramme 14.5 Promoting regional cooperation and integration

21. This subprogramme should include activities aimed at implementing the urgent measures and recommendations agreed to at the mid-term review of the New Agenda, relating to programmes to promote subregional and regional cooperation and integration, particularly in the areas of transport and communications, commodity diversification and capacity-building.

Programme 15. Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific

22. The proposed programme conforms generally with the legislative mandates pertinent to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). It broadly captures the trends and prevailing conditions in the Asia and Pacific region.

23. Although the focus of the proposed programme on the three major themes of regional economic cooperation, environment and sustainable development, and poverty alleviation, is welcomed, there may be a need to sharpen the subprogramme elements further to better reflect desired activities in conformity with relevant legislative mandates, including the recently held United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

24. Appropriate provision should be made to enable the programme to take into account a reorientation of activities within the plan period as a result of the internal restructuring currently under way in ESCAP.

25. In this regard, the Group of 77 and China proposes the following:

(a) South-South cooperation, including the triangular modality of collaboration, should receive the highest priority in terms of guiding specific activities to achieve the objectives of subprogrammes 15.1 (Regional economic cooperation: trade and investment), 15.2 (Regional economic cooperation: research and policy analysis) and 15.3 (Regional economic cooperation: industry and technology);

(b) To add the following text to paragraph 15.4:

"It will emphasize South-South cooperation, including the triangular modality of collaboration, to guide specific activities to achieve the objectives of the various subprogrammes";

(c) In paragraph 15.6 to replace the words "with support from developed countries, that is, tripartite cooperation" with the words "with appropriate support from developed countries, as well as from United Nations agencies, funds and programmes";

26. Critical to the strengthening of national capacities in achieving environmentally sound and sustainable development is the access to environmentally friendly or sound technology and the provision of environmentally sound infrastructure in human settlements. Hence, the provisions of Agenda 21 relative to access of such technology should find concrete expression in subprogramme 15.4, Environment and sustainable development. Account should also be taken of the results of Habitat II. In this regard, the Group of 77 and China proposes the following changes:

(a) In paragraph 15.11, to replace the words "that have emerged since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and on the Secretary-General's Agenda for Development" with the words "that have emerged from recent global conferences such as the World Summit for Social Development, held at Copenhagen and Habitat II in Istanbul";

(b) After paragraph 15.11 (d), to add a new subparagraph to read:

"(d) bis To work with Governments and regional and international associations of local authorities, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, academic institutions and other regional or subregional groupings to develop regional human settlements plans of action addressing priority issues specific to the Asia and Pacific region";

(c) After paragraph 15.11 (g), to add a new subparagraph to read:

"(g) bis To promote opportunities that will enable developing countries to acquire environmentally friendly or sound technology to contribute to the strengthening of national capacities in achieving sustainable development."

Programme 17. Economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean

27. The Group of 77 and China considers that programme 17 seems to be drafted in accordance with the relevant mandates. However, the Group would like to stress that the restructuring process of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean is a direct responsibility of its member States and, in this regard, the medium-term plan should reflect the priorities stated in document LC/G.1942.

Programme 18. Economic and Social Development in Western Asia

28. The Group of 77 and China considers that programme 18 reflects the relevant mandates of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). Concerning the process of restructuring, considerable efforts have already been achieved. The Group would also like to stress that the restructuring process of ESCWA is a direct responsibility of its member States.

European Union

[30 October 1996]

Preliminary remarks

1. The European Union is prepared to comment briefly on programmes 5 to 11 and 14 to 18 of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 set out in the relevant accompanying documents to document A/51/6. However, in keeping with its view that consideration of the medium-term plan is primarily a matter for the Fifth Committee, taking into account the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the European Union will confine itself at this stage to general remarks. In this regard, it notes the consensus reached in the Committee for Programme and Coordination. More detailed comments of the European Union, as well as its views on other programmes, will be conveyed in the Fifth Committee. In accordance with the invitation of the Chairman of the Fifth Committee to ensure that programmes of relevance to the work of the Second Committee are considered by the latter, the representatives of the European Union in the Second Committee are taking the opportunity to consult with and brief their Fifth Committee colleagues to ensure that the Second Committee dimension and concerns of its European Union members are fully accommodated in the Fifth Committee.

2. The European Union is of the view that the medium-term plan should reflect the political parameters established in recent United Nations conferences, promote their integrated implementation and assess the organizational needs, including administrative budget, to facilitate the implementation of the commitments. In this context, it notes that the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/227, agreed that the role and working methods of the Committee for Programme and Coordination should be reviewed with a view to finding ways of improving programme coordination functions.

Programme 5. Policy coordination and sustainable development

Programme 7. Economic and social information and policy analysis

Programme 8. Development support and management services

General comments

3. Before turning to the details of the three programmes mentioned above, which relate to the activities of the current three departments in the economic, social and related areas, the European Union would like to make a general comment on the organization of the Secretariat.

4. The European Union is convinced that the role of the United Nations in the field of development activities would be substantially strengthened if the three secretariat departments with responsibilities in this area were to be merged under the authority of a single Under-Secretary-General responsible for policy formulation and coordination in the fields of sustainable development and economic cooperation, while coherence and coordination of operational activities should also be appropriately enhanced through the strengthening of the relevant

secretariat function. Delegates will recall that the European Union has tabled proposals to this effect in the Agenda for Development exercise.

5. Acceptance of these proposals would, of necessity, require a rewriting of the programmes under discussion. While this is not feasible in the time-frame that we have, the Union's views on the individual programmes will be framed with its general comments in mind.

Programme 5. Policy coordination and sustainable development

6. The programme makes only passing reference to the central coordinating function of the Economic and Social Council and little reference to the key role of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. While drafted before the adoption of resolution 50/227, its omission of any more detailed reference to these bodies is surprising. Subprogramme 5.1 could be revised accordingly.

7. On sustainable development, the programme addresses the purpose and functioning of the Division on Sustainable Development. This is a key Division in the area of the follow-up to the Rio Conference and to the other major conferences on development issues. It would have been desirable if there had been more emphasis on the people-centred nature of sustainable development.

8. The Union believes that the Division has a role in monitoring developments relating to the implementation of the intergovernmental conventions dealing with various aspects of sustainable development agreed to in recent years.

Programme 6. Africa: New Agenda for Development

9. The European Union supports the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s and played an active role at the recent mid-term review in seeking to ensure that the focus for the remaining period of the Agenda should be on implementation. In this context, the Special Initiative for Africa is an important initiative of the United Nations and its implementation should be properly reflected in the medium-term plan. With these comments, the European Union supports programme 6 as outlined but would query whether there is possible duplication of activities between subprogrammes 1 and 3. Both seem to be dealing largely with the same area, namely, the mobilization of international support and awareness of the critical economic situation of Africa. The Union would also ask whether the activities of the Department of Public Information could not be covered under that Department's budget.

Programme 7. Economic and social information and policy analysis

10. There seems to be a good deal of similarity between subprogrammes 7.3 and 7.4. In subprogramme 7.3, for example, in paragraph 7.8 (c), the objectives are defined as assisting "Member States and intergovernmental bodies in the early identification of new and emerging issues". In subprogramme 7.4, in paragraph 7.10 (b), its objectives are to "enable the world community to respond to persistent problems and emerging issues in socio-economic development". Perhaps there is scope for rationalizing these subprogrammes.

Programme 8. Development support and management services

11. There should have been a more explicit reference to the outcome of the resumed session of the General Assembly devoted to public administration and development, held in April 1996, and to ways in which the Department was planning to focus its activities in the areas identified in resolution 50/225.

12. There would appear to be a case for reviewing the scope of subprogramme 8.2 dealing with environment and social development management in the light of subprogramme 5.4 dealing with the issue of sustainable development.

Programme 9. Trade and development

13. The European Union would expect that the programme should reflect the results of the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. The Union is pleased that consensus was reached on a revised programme at Geneva and it notes that the matter is now taken account of in the official text of the revised programme.

Programme 10. Environment

14. The Union, at this stage, is in agreement with the broad terms of this programme and sees no need at the present time to make comments on its contents.

Programme 11. Human settlements

15. The European Union is awaiting a revised text, as requested by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, reflecting the consensus reached at Habitat II. It wishes the revised text to be consistent with the outcome of the Istanbul Conference.

Programmes 14 through 18

16. The Union is broadly in agreement with the terms of these programmes.

17. However, it notes that implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences is given low priority in some of the programmes and none in others. The Union would wish to see emphasis placed on the need for an integrated follow-up to these conferences. It also notes that there are few references to the processes of internal reform which the regional commissions have indicated that they have embarked upon and wishes the programmes to take these reforms fully into account.

Australia, Canada and New Zealand

1. It is the understanding of the countries comprising Australia, Canada and New Zealand that the medium-term plan is not a legislative mandate in itself but can and should be a powerful tool for member States and the Secretary-General alike to plan, programme, budget, control and evaluate the implementation of legislative mandates. The plan does not constitute an opportunity for the renegotiation of previously agreed mandates.

2. The Group's understanding derives from programme planning regulation 3.2, which clearly states "the medium-term plan shall be a translation of legislative mandates into programmes. Its objectives and strategies shall be derived from the policy orientations and goals set by the intergovernmental organs".

3. It is important for delegates in all the Main Committees to be aware of the practical impact of their political decisions on the work of the Organization, and its finances. To this end, it is useful for delegates to be aware of the provisions in the medium-term plan that relate to their areas of work. However, keeping in mind that the plan is a general guide for the use of the Secretariat, the group does not think it appropriate for each of the Main Committees to pass judgement on the minute details of the medium-term plan.

4. The Organization already has appropriate mechanisms for considering the medium-term plan. Member States can express their views on the plan in the Committee for Programme and Coordination (the terms of reference of which are set out in Economic and Social Council resolution 2008 (LX) of 14 May 1976) and in the Fifth Committee. In these forums Member States are able to ensure that the plan reflects the key programme areas enshrined in the budget and that it takes into account all the relevant legislative mandates.

Russian Federation

1. The Russian Federation welcomes this opportunity to express its opinion on programme planning in accordance with the procedure provided for in General Assembly resolution 41/213.

2. The Russian Federation joined the consensus at the thirty-sixth session of the Committee on Programme and Coordination on the programmes of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 related to the work of the Second Committee. In this connection, it has no particular comments on the programmes of the medium-term plan referred to above. Russian delegates in the Second and Fifth Committees will be in consultation when these programmes are discussed in the Fifth Committee.

3. At the same time, the Russian Federation would like to take this opportunity to share some ideas on the matter. It sees the need to improve the intergovernmental consultative process in the area of programme planning. Although the mechanism for this exists through the premises of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the Economic and Social Council, the provisions of resolution 41/213 and the General Assembly, it sees a strong need to adjust it in line with the realities of the present and taking into account the provisions of recent resolutions adopted in the United Nations, in particular General Assembly resolution 50/227.

4. The Russian Federation is of the view that, in accordance with the above-mentioned resolution, the working methods of the Committee for Programme and Coordination should be reviewed to utilize it more fully in the area of programme planning and coordination. The Russian Federation considers that programme-related issues should be discussed thoroughly at the spring session of the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the results of that discussion

should be transmitted to the Economic and Social Council for consideration at its next substantive session under the agenda item on programme planning.

5. There should be no discussion of or negotiations on these issues during the work of the Main Committees of the General Assembly apart from the Fifth Committee where decisions are adopted. Exceptions should be made when new issues arise that could not have been taken into account during the sessions of the Committee for Programme and Coordination or the Economic and Social Council or that need adjustment (e.g., the current programmes on trade and development and human settlements). The Council should be the main United Nations body to consider programme planning and coordination and take note of the decisions adopted by the Committee for Programme and Coordination for consideration and approval by the Fifth Committee.

6. This, however, should not prevent countries from expressing their opinions on issues of particular interest to them through a letter from the Chairman of the Second Committee to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 41/213. These opinions could be individual or group opinions without holding negotiations on the subject.

United States of America

[1 November 1996]

The United States of America participated in the negotiations in the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the proposed medium-term plan for 1998-2001. The report reflecting the work of the Committee (A/51/16 (Part II)), the document of record that has been referred to the Fifth Committee, accurately reflects the substantive views of the United States on those programmes referred to the Second Committee for comment.